



HRSP NEWSLETTER

U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section

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Denver man who lied about war crimes he committed in Ethiopia in order to come to the United States and become a citizen sentenced to 22 years in federal prison

A Colorado man who used a false identity and lied to gain immigration status in the United States to hide his role in the torture and murder of civilians in Ethiopia in the 1970s was sentenced on May 23 in federal court to serve 22 years in federal prison. John Doe, a/k/a Habteab Berhe Temanu, a/k/a Habteab B Temanu, a/k/a "TUFA", a/k/a Kefelegn Alemu, a/k/a Kefelegn Alemu Worku, age approximately 62, a Denver resident of Ethiopian descent, was sentenced by Senior U.S. District Court Judge John L. Kane to the lengthy prison term for unlawful procurement of citizenship, making false statements on immigration documents and identity theft, U.S. Attorney John Walsh and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Special Agent in Charge Kumar Kibble announced. Worku lied on immigration forms about his involvement in the torturing and murder of people in Ethiopia during the Red Terror. Following his prison sentence, Judge Kane ordered Worku to serve 3 years on supervised release. At the sentencing hearing, Judge Kane stripped Worku of his U.S. citizenship he had obtained after immigrating to the U.S., rendering Worku subject to deportation proceedings. Taking Worku's citizenship is required based on the conviction of these crimes. Worku appeared at the sentencing hearing in custody, and was remanded at its conclusion.

Worku was indicted by a federal grand jury in Denver on August 20, 2012 and arrested a short time later. A superseding indictment was obtained on June 18, 2013. Worku was convicted of all counts of the superseding indictment on October 11, 2013 following a five day jury trial before Judge Kane. The counts of conviction were the unlawful procurement of citizenship or naturalization; aggravated identity theft; and fraud and misuse of Visas, Permits and Other Documents.

According to court documents, and arguments at trial and at sentencing, Worku knowingly used the identification of another person, Habteab Berhe Temanu, to unlawfully procure citizenship or naturalization. Further, he made false statements in connection with his application for naturalization which was submitted in November 2009, and which statements he re-affirmed under penalty of perjury in March 2010, including falsely identifying himself as Habteab Berhe Temanu; falsely representing that he was the father of five children; and falsely responding "No" to the question: "Have you **ever** persecuted (*either directly or indirectly*) any person because of race, religion, national origin, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."

In May 2011, HSI received information from an informant who was a naturalized U.S. citizen, originally a native of Ethiopia, that he had recently encountered a person in Denver who he recognized as Kefelegn Alemu Worku, a prison guard during a period in the late 1970's in Ethiopia known as the "Red Terror."

In the late 1970's in Ethiopia, Mengistu Haile Mariam assumed unofficial control of the Provisional Military Administrative Committee also known as the Dergue. The Dergue was a committee of nearly 120 military officers that established a Marxist regime and abolished Ethiopia's Constitution and arrested the former emperor and members of the imperial government for alleged crimes against the Ethiopian people. Mengistu seized full control in 1977 which unleashed a two-year campaign known as the "Red Terror."

During the Red Terror, tens of thousands of Ethiopian men, women and children suspected of being members or supporters of the anti-Dergue group were arrested, tortured and summarily executed. One prison that held, tortured and killed individuals was known as “Kebele 15” or “Kefetegna 15” which in English roughly translates as “Higher 15.” This prison housed approximately 1500 prisoners who had been imprisoned due to their political opinions and affiliations. During the Red Terror families of the killed or missing were often required to pay the government for the bullet used to kill the family member. Historical accounts indicate that a minimum of 10,000 people were killed in the city of Addis Ababa alone in 1977, with probably comparable numbers in the provinces in 1977 and 1978.

The witness explained that he had become a political prisoner in Ethiopia in 1978 when he was arrested and sent to the Higher 15. He witnessed Worku torture fellow prisoners and learned that other prisoners were being executed at the hands of prison guards, including Worku. The informant managed to escape the prison in September 1979. Two additional Ethiopian refugees who are now naturalized U.S. citizens who testified at sentencing also identified the defendant as Worku and recounted how Worku had personally participated in beating and torturing them at the same prison during the same time period.

HSI agents, using information obtained from the informant, determined that Worku was using the identity of Habteab B. Temanu and living in an apartment in Denver. Immigration records confirmed that Worku, using Temanu’s identity, came to the United States in July 2004. He lived in Denver until his indictment.

“By sentencing defendant Worku to the maximum possible term for his crime, Judge Kane sent a stern, determined message that the United States will not allow its generous asylum laws to be manipulated to create a safe haven for murderers and torturers from abroad,” said U.S. Attorney John Walsh. “Our system of justice has successfully removed the defendant from the immigrant community he once terrorized, and in so doing vindicated not only our laws, but the rights of the defendant’s many victims now living here in our country.”

“Homeland Security Investigations aggressively pursues Human Rights and War Crimes Violators like Kefelegn Alemu Worku,” said Kumar C. Kibble, special agent in charge of HSI Denver. “Our HSI investigation and partnership with the U.S. Attorney’s Office to prosecute Worku show that we will not allow the United States to become a safe haven for war criminals. In the unlikely event that Worku ever completes his lengthy prison sentence, he will be transferred to ICE custody and placed in deportation proceedings. A federal immigration judge will then determine if he will be deported to Ethiopia.”

This case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in conjunction with the Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center, and was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Brenda Taylor. People with information about former human rights violators in the United States are urged to contact U.S. law enforcement: HRSP, hrrstips@usdoj.gov or 1-800-813-5863; HSI tip line, 1-866-DHS-2-ICE (1-800-347-2423) or complete its online tip form <http://www.ice.gov/exec/forms/hsi-tips/tips.asp>; and FBI’s Genocide War Crimes Unit, tip form at <https://tips.fbi.gov/>

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